

sinn féin
fó-choisde oideachais
“Is mór í an fírinne agus saorfaid
Sí Sinn”
“THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE”

leigheáit an
Eiteacha an Aithrise Móra
i Éirinn

LECTURE ON
ETHICS OF THE IRISH
REVOLUTION

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columban na banban

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FOREWORD.

These Lectures, issued by the Educational Department of the Sinn Fein Organisation, do not purport to be finished studies on any question, but suggestive matter for debate in the Cumainn and outside—couched in simple language so that they may reach to all.

In writing them the needs of the remote country side where it is not always easy to send Lecturers, have been considered, rather than those of the cities and large towns where schools and libraries are available, though it is to be regretted not availed of as much as they should be.

The Lecture on the present position of the Republic—"Where We Stand Now"—represents the Official Republican position. In other papers written on subjects on which opinion may be divided and divergent views do not affect fundamental principles of Nationality, these very possibilities of differences, and the consequent interesting debates that may arise, will prove one of the most helpful educational weapons, by teaching people to think for themselves.

"Educate that you may be free."

Ethics of the Irish Revolution.

TERMINOLOGY AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

Before considering the various questions relating to the subject of this paper, it will be well to define our terms, and to lay down also some general principles on the matter of war and revolt.

War is a contest carried on by force of arms between nations or states, or between parties in the same state; when the conflict is between distinct and separate nations it is called international war; when between parties in the same nation it is civil war. Insurrection and revolt seem to be milder terms than rebellion, but these three may be defined as an armed rising or war against the government of a nation by citizens of that nation. A revolution, which is not necessarily accompanied by armed hostilities, is a movement or series of movements involving the overthrow of an existing government or political system and the establishment of another. All these are to be distinguished from anarchic convulsion or riot, which, being a wild violent disturbance, is always bad. We shall consider war and revolt here under a single aspect, viz., as an appeal to arms in the disputes of nations and states.

It has never been seriously contended by any weighty authority that all war is unlawful. And the words revolution, revolt, and such like can bear quite a respectable character in the English language. We speak of the war of Independence in America as the American Revolution. It should be noted that the American Revolution was not a case of revolt in its least severe form. It was a revolt against a mother-country; and the causes which gave rise to it, at least in the beginning, were not so grave as has been the case in many other revolts. There was much more

cause for the Irish Revolution. In this instance, the people rose against a foreign invading and usurping power, and they revolted to vindicate the most elementary and fundamental national rights.

It is instructive for our purpose here to notice the beginnings of the American Revolution. The men who started the American Revolution numbered only a little band of farmers, whom the English would call contemptible Yankees and rebels. They were not soldiers of a regular and disciplined army; and they essayed to engage well-trained British troops. They had little hope of achieving a military victory; but they determined to sacrifice themselves as an example and an inspiration to their countrymen.

The case of the American Civil War is also worthy of our consideration here. The issue in that war was the legalising of slavery and the right of the Southern States to secede from the American Union. The world does not condemn Lincoln for his action which precipitated the armed conflict between North and South. Nevertheless, one of the causes, at least, for which the South contended, viz., Secession, was not altogether undebateable. If we compare the Civil War in America with the Irish Civil War, we see that there was much more justification for the Republican Government and Army engaging in civil war in Ireland, were we only to consider the Ulster question. For in Ireland it was a case of cutting off a whole province from the nation, at the behest of England and the behest of the descendants of England's planters in Ireland.

The use of force obviously results in injury to person and property; and war and revolt work terrible destruction and bring untold suffering and misery on nations and the world. In an ideal state, no doubt, moral suasion would be sufficient for the settlement of human affairs, and no place would be found for violent encounters amongst individuals or war amongst peoples. Even in our present state the battle of arms is not God's making. There is no conflict between right and right. And He has not set us one against another. Nevertheless, an appeal to arms is not necessarily a moral evil. It is clearly a drastic and dreadful expedient. But, unfortunately, oftentimes it is the only way of escape

from even greater evils. If the tyrant, the oppressor, and the plunderer were allowed to work with impunity the life of the nations would become unbearable. If the interests of right were to be surrendered to the force of might, chaos and ruin would ensue. Unfortunately, human wickedness is so great there will always be found nations, as there will always be found individuals, whose rule is force, and who will bow only to superior force. Besides, quite apart from the question of consequences, the right should be vindicated even by force, if necessary. The right is of God. It is too sacred and too great in itself to be allowed to go unvindicated. It is proper that the evil-doer should be crushed by force rather than allow the right to be desecrated. It would be truly a miserable thing that the evil-doer should triumph even in this life, and that God should be flouted and the innocent wronged with impunity.

The law allows the use of lethal weapons, even to individuals when there is urgent need to defend one's life or property. But the case of individuals is different from the case of nations. The individual can vindicate his rights in the courts of law. But there is no such redress when it is a question of nation and nation, or of one section of a nation in conflict with another section of the same nation. There is no world-court with authority and ability to judge and decide national and international disputes; and if there were such a court there is no world-army to enforce its decisions. It is, indeed, argued that an International League should be formed to end war. As to this proposition, it is scarcely necessary to remark that no League could hope to end war in this world altogether. But, undoubtedly, a genuine League of Nations could do much to diminish war and the horrors of war. However, the great obstacle to the realisation of this idea is the difficulty of finding honest and sincere nations to form a league. There seems to be only one certain and effective remedy against armed conflicts between nations and peoples, viz., the adherence of the nations to the teaching and spirit of Christ. Appeals to the force of arms will be prevented according to the measure of the people's adhesion to the principles of justice and Christian charity laid down by the Church, whose Founder

is the Prince of Peace. The aim of all peoples should be to avoid the way of violence and force ; but we may conclude that it will always be the case that emergencies will arise when the way of force will be the only hope left the wronged nation to vindicate its rights.

War and revolt are rigidly surrounded with conditions for their lawfulness. The appeal to arms should not be decided on lightly, but as a last resort and reluctantly. And armed conflicts should not last a moment longer than is needed to vindicate the right. Whilst the battle is being waged it is, of course, a noble and heroic thing to fight vigorously and bravely. The Church prays for her sons who engage in a just war ; but her prayer breathes nothing of the desire for carnage or destruction. Zeal for the right and love of one's country should be the motive-power of the fighting forces of a nation. To delight in war for the sake of war is cruel and inhuman.

A grave cause is required to justify an appeal to arms, such as the defence of the interests of religion, the shaking off of tyranny or oppression, defence of the lives and liberties of a people, defence of the sovereignty, integrity, honour of a nation. Then it is more difficult to justify civil than international war. From the nature of the case, the causes which may give rise to civil war are fewer. And civil war is more terrible, and more difficult to wage. I am speaking of a conflict which is civil war in the strict sense ; for if a section of a nation make war on another section of the same nation in collusion with another separate state, civil war becomes endowed also with something of the character of international war.

Before passing from this, there is a very important matter to be noted with reference to the actual combatants, viz., the obligation of soldiers as regards the lawfulness of war and revolt. Soldiers of an army are not bound to inquire into the cause of hostilities. It is the duty of a soldier to obey. Sometimes they are not in a position to judge ; and even when they are, very often they will not know how to decide. This doctrine is unquestionable. It follows, therefore, that no religious disabilities are to be inflicted on

soldiers, such as the deprivation of the Sacraments, even in an unjust war.

Then a just war or revolt must be made by the people, that is, it must be directed by the rulers or leaders through organised forces of the nation; and in civil war, by the leaders of the section which defends the rights of the nation. Unauthorised and spasmodic attacks are likely to be ineffective and harmful. By the word nation here should also be understood an oppressed people whose territory is occupied and even annexed by an alien power, whose regular army is disbanded, and the machinery of whose government is in the hands of the invader. Such a people retains its national rights entirely intact. It must bide its time. But at the first opportunity, when there is hope of striking an effective blow for its freedom, the people can take up arms in an endeavour to expel and repel the invading power. Neither does it matter if a preceding generation bowed to the will of the alien power. In this hypothesis the usurper is in no better case than the highway robber, who by threats or force comes into the possession of the property of others. Forced consent is not true consent, and in this connection it should be remembered also that freedom and sovereignty are national rights which cannot be alienated. They belong to each generation, and when violated each generation can, and, to save its honour, ought to vindicate them.

These principles laid down here are the content of the natural law; and they have never been seriously questioned by any outstanding authority. History has countless examples of lawful appeals to arms. In Christian times the mind of the Church is strikingly reflected in the famous Crusades. And under the Old Dispensation we have the very remarkable example of just and holy revolt in the case of Judas Machabeus. This great man and "they that were with him, went privately into the towns, and . . . they assembled 6,000 men. And they called upon the Lord. . . . So coming unawares upon the towns and cities, he set them on fire, and taking possession of the most commodious places, he made no small slaughter of the enemies" (II Machabees).

THE SCHOOLMEN AND ST. THOMAS.

The master theologians of the Church, the Schoolmen, explain for us the reason of the doctrine of just war and revolt. Treating of tyranny they give us to understand the idea which is at the basis of the whole subject. They lay it down that the government of nations must be constituted by the nations themselves and with the consent of the people. "Civil power," says Suarez, "wherever it is found in one man or ruler, has immediately or remotely emanated from the people and community, and cannot be otherwise possessed if it is just" (*De Legibus*, iii. 4, 2). St. Thomas says that a ruler has not the power of making laws "unless in as much as he bears the person of the multitude" (I-II, q. 97, a. 3, ad 3). Later on we find St. Alphonsus writing: "the power" (of making civil laws) "belongs to no one by nature except the community of men, and from this it is transferred to one or many by whom the community is ruled" (*De Legibus*, n. 104). The fundamental idea is that a nation is a master and owner. And as one cannot take possession of or use or dispose of another person's property without his consent, neither can a nation or power occupy or use or dispose of or control what belongs to another nation without its consent. And, of course, all this is far more true when it is a question of interference with liberty. Liberty belongs most intimately to the individual and the nation. So much so that no right-minded man or people could consent to its surrender. A people's freedom is inalienable. The nation, then, is owner of its liberty. The nation is owner and master of its territory and possessions. It is of the nation to have and to hold and control the same, to the exclusion of all others. It follows that no other power or state may lawfully interfere with thlie berty and independence of a nation in the slightest. It follows that no other power or state may invade or occupy or use or dispose of or destroy the territory or possessions of a nation. To nations as well as individuals it was said: "Thou shalt not covet: Thou shalt not steal: Thou shalt not kill." It follows also that, like the burglar, the invading and usurping nation may be driven out by

force And as neither force nor continued possession gives the robber a right to his loot, so neither force nor occupation nor time gives the invader a right to his plunder. Might can never change right. *Res clamat domino suo.* And the voice of justice is never silenced.

It is true, most modern Catholic ethicists reject the doctrine laid down here. However, their opinions are of little value on the subject we are discussing. They can cite no trustworthy authority for their own teaching, nor can they sustain their views with any solid reasons. Two Papal decisions indeed are quoted to confirm their opinions. But these decrees have no bearing on the issue, and refer clearly to sedition and unlawful revolt. It is a fact that some older writers hold the views taught by the moderns, but they are only a few and are writers of little authority. Professor O'Rahilly, after a laborious investigation of Catholic philosophers and theologians from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, found that 140 uphold the principle that government is based on the consent of the governed, and only seven, of doubtful orthodoxy, reject it.

The views held by some moderns seem absurd to us in these democratic days. Take Dr. Cronin, for example. He concedes sovereignty to a state; but he makes it clear that by the word state in this connection he means the ruler or government, not the people or nation. He likens political authority to paternal authority (*The Science of Ethics*, vol. ii. p. 517). According to this view, the people have no power at all. No one maintains that little children give authority to their parents. These extraordinary opinions seem to be based on a strange misconception of the nature of civil authority, which the people confer on their government. Obviously, the people do not give to their government the will-power and the intellectual faculties and ability to rule their nation: they only give to their rulers the authority, that is, the right to direct the affairs of their country. Surely no one need fear to concede this honour to the people. It can take nothing from God, from Whom all power comes down in the first instance.

Very different from the teachings of these moderns was the

teaching of Cardinal Mercier to the Belgians when the Germans invaded and occupied their country: Here are his words: "The sole lawful authority in Belgium is that of our King, or of our Government, of the elected representatives of the nation. This authority alone has a right to our affection, our submission. Thus, the invader's acts of public administration have in themselves no authority, but legitimate authority has tacitly ratified such of those acts as affect the general interest, and this ratification, and this only, gives them juridic value."

We may close this question with the words of Balmes, thus: "That it is unlawful and contrary to our holy religion, to combine together and raise forces for the overthrow of a *de facto* government (an unlawful government) is a doctrine which Catholic theologians have never professed, which true philosophy has never admitted, and which no nation has ever observed."

IRELAND'S REVOLT.

Now, let us consider the Irish Revolution in detail. It will be well, before proceeding, to examine the terminology we are to use. Doubtless, there will be some dispute on this matter. According to some great authorities it might be said that England has waged an implicit war against the Irish people since the Invasion. But in these pages we are not examining events prior to 1916. Easter week may be defined as a revolt, viz., against the *de facto* Government; it may also be described as war waged against England's forces by the forces of the Provisional Government of the proclaimed Irish Republic. The conflict of 1920 was war in the full sense, being an encounter between the forces of the elected Independent Government of the Irish people and British forces. The armed conflict of 1922 may be described as war on the Irish Republic, no longer waged by England's own army, but by the forces of the Free State Provisional Government established by England; or a revolt of citizens against the lawful Republican Government; or the continuation of the revolt and war against English rule and domination in Ireland. It was clearly

civil war. It partook also of the nature of international war, because it was begun by forces paying allegiance, through the "Provisional Government," to England's King, and because it was initiated under England's threat and carried on with England's help.

In the first place, let us examine the general question of the lawfulness of the movement to overthrow English power in Ireland. We ask, then, what right has England in Ireland, or what right has England to control or interfere in Irish affairs. The answer is that England has no right. The Irish are a distinct race, a separate people, capable of directing and ruling themselves. In the dispositions of God's Providence, this island has come into the lawful possession of the Irish people. It is theirs to have, to hold, and to control, to the exclusion of all others. England has no right or title in this island, or to interfere with the affairs of the Irish people, internal or external. Yet England has occupied this country, and subjected and plundered and ruined its people. It is not necessary here to recount all the wrong she has done to this nation through the centuries. Suffice it to say, that England has been an aggressor and plundering invader from the beginning. And it would have been perfectly lawful for the Irish people, at any time since the Invasion, to drive her out by force.

The arguments which England uses to justify her position carry no weight. I ignore the argument of conquest. To concede rights to conquest is to concede rights to plunder and slaughter. Neither does it avail to say that the Irish people consented to English rule. The Irish people never freely consented to alien rule. And if it were true that a past generation had consented to the subjection of our country, we of this generation, and the men and women of every other generation, should save their honour, repudiate such agreement, and set about expelling the foreigner from our land. Finally, the imperialistic argument is of no value. If, in order to vindicate the rights of this nation, or any other nation, England's Empire must be dissolved, there is nothing left but to dissolve England's Empire. Right must prevail, no matter how imperial interests suffer. Right

is supreme ; and no power on earth, not even the Pope, can abate the demands of right.

THE I.R.B.

Before considering the various phases of the Irish Revolution, we must enquire into the status of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which brought about the Easter Rising and the proclamation of the Irish Republic. I shall dismiss the question of the I.R.B. since the Irish Volunteers became the army of the Republic in 1919, with the remark that in the changed conditions which obtained in that year, the existence of a secret military organisation was unnecessary and dangerous. Cathal Brugha realised this in 1919, and broke with the I.R.B. Now, it is easy to justify the existence of the I.R.B. The only hope for our liberty lay in an appeal to arms ; for it had always been clear that England would bow to a free and independent Ireland only by force. If, then, we were to recover our freedom, it behoved us to prepare for the hour of freedom. Obviously the only possible way of preparation was through a secret military organisation, such as the I.R.B. All free nations protect and defend their freedom with the sword. Good and holy men had set us illustrious examples. We had the case of Garcia Moreno, the saviour of Ecuador, which Leo XIII. called " the model of a Christian State." This brave patriot did not hesitate to form a provisional government and lead his raw levies against the tyrannous dictators in his country. Again we had the history of the revolt of the Tyrolese. When the Tyrol was invaded early in the nineteenth century and its people oppressed, that truly Christian patriot, Andreas Hofer, decided to risk all to save his country. Secret preparations were made for an insurrection. The peasants met on Sundays and feast days to train themselves in good marksmanship and to form their plans for the rising. Hofer sought help from Austria, carrying on a secret correspondence by huntsmen over the mountains, in messages purporting to be written by a betrothed to his fiancee. And then, when the appointed day was at hand he addressed the people of his valley, saying : " Tomorrow we shall march for God, Emperor, and Fatherland."

Reference must be made here to the condemnation of the Fenian organisation by Pius IX. There can be no doubt that in this action the Pope was labouring under a misapprehension. The secret societies which justly come under the ban of the Church are those which plot against the Church and lawful civil authority. Evidently Pius IX was led to believe that the Fenians came under this category ; and thus he was induced to condemn them. But it is untrue that the Fenians are to be classed with these banned secret societies. The Fenians were not out against the Church, but only out to vindicate the God-given rights of their country : they were not out against lawful civil authority, but against unlawful power and unlawful authority. The Church could not condemn a body of men with such noble aims : rather she praises and blesses every oppressed people struggling towards its liberation. In the words of Balmes, already quoted, that " it is unlawful and contrary to our holy religion, to combine together and raise forces for the overthrow of a *de facto* Government is a doctrine which Catholic theologians have never professed."

No special mention need be made here of the Volunteers. Had they remained under the sole control of their founders, doubtless the history of the organisation would be very different. But once the Irish Party section gained the upper hand, it was evident the Volunteers as a united body would never bring off a revolution for the Freedom of Ireland. When the crisis came, the vast majority followed John Redmond, and finally melted away. The faithful remnant was inspired and led by the I.R.B., and, true to the teachings of Emmet and Tone, carried out the Rising of 1916.

EASTER WEEK AND AFTER.

It is easy to justify the Easter Week Rising. In this connection there is scarcely need to examine any other question but the question of success ; for it is clear there was just cause for revolt. It is clear also Pearse and his comrades had the implicit authority of the nation for the Rising. The Rising Proclamation read : " In the name of God. . . Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom." That statement was

true. When the opportunity offers, Ireland wishes her children to strike for liberty. In every nation one finds hirelings and cowards. But the will of these should not weigh. The Irish Nation wishes to be free. And even if there should be only one brave son left, it is for him, when the hour comes, to lead the way to freedom. Now, as to the question of success. Every blow dealt a tyrant makes for liberty. All right-minded men and peoples applaud a blow struck for freedom. Little Belgium could not hope to withstand the Kaiser's forces, but still she flung her little army against the German legions; and the whole world stood in admiration. The men of 1916 had an assured hope of the success of the rising. Apart from the question of a military success, they were certain of a spiritual success and a moral victory. The original plans were frustrated, and thus the hope of a military success was lost. In any case the Rising was an effective blow for Irish Freedom: and if the men of 1916 had only the hope of striking one effective blow to free their country the Rising was justified.

The war of independence of 1920 was clearly just. In 1919 the conditions in Ireland were altogether changed. There existed an independent Government and Parliament elected by the people. The proclamation of the Irish Republic had been confirmed. The Irish Volunteers had become the army of the Republic. England still refused to evacuate the country and surrender the machinery of government; and the war of 1920 developed as a result of her continued aggression and interference in the affairs of the Irish Nation. The Republican Government did not want war in 1920 and 1921. But the English would continue to be the unlawful aggressors of the Irish people. And no alternative was left to Ireland's soldiers but to defend the country and the rights of the nation.

1922-1923.

Now we come to the conflict of 1922. If the war of 1920 was just, with more truth can we say the defensive war of the I.R.A. in 1922 was just. After the Truce, England although refusing to recognise the Republic, no longer called the I.R.A. a murder gang, but treated them as soldiers.

Moreover, the heads of the Provisional Government agreed that the I.R.A. was the army of the nation until the people declared for the disestablishment of the Republic. The Provisional Government had no authority from the people or the Second Dail—the lawful Government of the country, to make war on the I.R.A. On the contrary, the people, in accordance with the terms of the Pact, confirmed the existing status of the I.R.A. and the Republic; and delegated their authority for the direction of the nation's affairs, not to the Provisional Government, but to the Third Dail elected by them. Then the conflict of 1922 was not opened by the I.R.A. but begun by the forces of the Provisional Government, acting under pressure from England, and with the object of forestalling the Third Parliament chosen by the people, and destroying the Republic. In these circumstances it was clearly the duty of the army to defend itself and the Republic.

It has been said that the defensive war of the I.R.A. was an attack on the majority will of the Irish people. That is not the case. It is true in the beginning the majority would have accepted the so-called Treaty. But it is not true that they would have accepted it, plus civil war, to be followed by the co-existence in the country of two rival governments and two rival armies. After some time the people saw the danger which threatened the country; and they voted, not for the Treaty, or for an attack on the Republic, or for civil war, but for the national Pact which aimed at saving the nation from these things. In this connection there should be no misunderstanding. If in truth the majority of the people were for surrendering the inalienable rights of the nation, it would be the duty of a faithful minority to defend these rights as far as they could.

A word remains to be said about the phase of the situation since the order was given to the I.R.A. to cease fire. When the army of the Republic found itself pitted against overwhelming odds and unable to obtain a victory in the field over the Free State forces, it was right that the order "Cease Fire" should have been issued and obeyed. But the legality of the position remains unchanged. The present Republican Government possesses the authority given by the Irish people to the Second Dail. The Second Dail has not been dissolved

and never laid down the power given to it by the people. The Republican Government, then, is the only truly lawful Government in Ireland, and the Republican army is the only truly legal army in Ireland. It is the duty of that army to stand by as the situation develops. And it is the duty of the Republican Government to safeguard the interests of the nation as best it can until such time as it can hand over the authority it has been entrusted with to a Third Dail freely elected by the Irish people.